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UPI-90

(WAR CRIMES)

WASHINGTON--A HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE HAS CRITICIZED THE PENTAGON FOR FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE POSSIBLE WAR CRIMES BY U.S. SOLDIERS AGAINST VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS IN A SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLITICAL ASSASSINATION PROGRAM, IT WAS LEARNED TODAY.

BUT THE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE APPARENTLY WILL LET THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE REPORT DIE. ONLY A HANDFUL OF MEMBERS SHOWED UP FOR A COMMITTEE MEETING, TODAY, PREVENTING A QUORUM.

REP. JOHN CONYERS, D-MICH., CONTACTED BY UPI, CHARGED A "COMPLETE DOUBLECROSS" BY BOTH DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ON THE COMMITTEE.

A COPY OF THE SECRET REPORT WAS OBTAINED EARLIER BY UPI FROM OTHER SOURCES.

THE REPORT SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT MANY OF THE MORE THAN 20,000 SUSPECTED VC KILLED UNDER THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PHOENIX PROGRAM WERE ACTUALLY INNOCENT CIVILIANS WHO WERE VICTIMS OF FAULTY INTELLIGENCE.

THE PRIVATE REPORT OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SUBCOMMITTEE, BASED ON A FIELD TRIP TO VIETNAM AND A SERIES OF HEARINGS OVER TWO YEARS, QUESTIONED "THE SERIOUS MORAL CONSIDERATIONS OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR A PROGRAM THAT HAS ALLEGEDLY INCLUDED TORTURE, MURDER AND INHUMANE TREATMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS."

THE PHOENIX PROGRAM, BEGUN IN 1968, IS AIMED AT IDENTIFYING THE MEMBERS OF THE SO-CALLED VIET CONG INFRASTRUCTURE IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND TO "NEUTRALIZE" THEM THROUGH EITHER DEATH OR INDEFINITE IMPRISONMENT, USUALLY WITHOUT TRIAL.

THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE SCHEDULED AT LEAST ONE OTHER MEETING ON THE REPORT SEPT. 17, BUT IT WAS CALLED OFF.

CONYERS SAID THAT AFTER TODAY'S FAILURE TO GAIN A QUORUM, ANOTHER TRY WOULD BE MADE TO HOLD A MEETING NEXT WEEK, BUT IT WAS DOUBTFUL CONGRESS WOULD ACT.

"IT IS CLEAR CONGRESS WANTS TO RATIONALIZE THIS WHOLE DAMED THING," HE SAID.

10/3--GE138P

Comment: Thuermer, Maury and CSDO have copies.

These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the Office of Current Intelligence to the attached item from the news services.